20210926 Joshua Chapter 19-21 Where Mercy Finds Us

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We are nearing the end of our study of Joshua, and we've discovered that the events found in the Book of Joshua are sort of a parallel to what goes on in the Christian Life. Israel left Egypt; we leave sin. Israel wandered in the desert for some forty years; and often we wander in our own Christian lives. Israel became fearful and no longer had faith and they were stuck in Kadesh Barnea for 38 ½ of those forty years. They sat looking over into the Promised Land while never receiving it. Often, "Wilderness Christians" hold back and never really experience the Canaan Living that is promised to each of us as our inheritance. Promised Land living or Canaan Living is what I am calling victorious Christian living. Like Israel in Kadesh-Barnea, we operate on fear instead of faith and we progress no further than that.

This walk that we're all in is a walk of faith. But the surprising thing is that this walk of faith is riddled with hardship, struggle, and conflict. Some of us believe and we accidently promote the idea that the Christian life is a struggle free life. Some Christians mistakenly believe that if there is struggle in their lives then they must be doing something wrong. That is simply not true. That is false teaching. It is in conflict with the Book of James and it is in conflict with the life of Jesus Himself and of course with the life of the Apostle Paul who endured every hardship imagineable. We find ourselves in struggle because the moment we became Christians we were in a spiritual war whether we acknowledge it or not. When we fight these battles against the world, the flesh, the devil, and dead batteries (stuff that just happens) we have to go into them and through them by faith. The world is mighty against us, and it is head-strong against the things of God and the mind of God. The Christian life by definition has hardship and struggle that comes with it.

Once we figure out how to experience Canaan Land living, we must also learn how to stay there. Our Christian life consists of more than just believing the promises of God, but it also consists of growing in Christ, and continuing to grow in our faith and stay strong. For the next couple of weeks, we are going to talk about a few principles of how we should live out our lives. This "living out" is about staying in Canaan land living once we're there. Today, we will focus on the "Refuge Cities" that God ordained. They have to do with mercy, and we should understand not only God's mercy extended towards

each of us, but we should also understand the mercy we are to extend to each other. That is part of Canaan living. Chapter 19 deals with the final dispensing of the land. We see each of the remaining tribes receiving their inheritance. It is finalized in verse 51 that reads, "*51 These are the territories that Eleazar the priest, Joshua son of Nun and the heads of the tribal clans of Israel assigned by lot at Shiloh in the presence of the LORD at the entrance to the tent of meeting. And so, they finished dividing the land." (Joshua 19:51, NIV).* Let's now turn to chapter 20 concerning the six cities of refuge.

20 *Then the LORD said to Joshua: 2 "Tell the Israelites to designate the cities of refuge, as I instructed you through Moses, 3 so that anyone who kills a person accidentally and unintentionally may flee there and find protection from the avenger of blood. 4 When they flee to one of these cities, they are to stand in the entrance of the city gate and state their case before the elders of that city. Then the elders are to admit the fugitive into their city and provide a place to live among them. 5 If the avenger of blood comes in pursuit, the elders must not surrender the fugitive, because the fugitive killed their neighbor unintentionally and without malice aforethought. 6 They are to stay in that city until they have stood trial before the assembly and until the death of the high priest who is serving at that time. Then they may go back to their own home in the town from which they fled. (Joshua 20:1-6, NIV).* We are then told that these six cities were set apart as cities of refuge: **Kedesh**, **Shechem, Hebron, Bezer**, and **Golan**.

The whole inclusion of these cities of refuge is kind of a strange thing. But remember, this wasn't a good idea that Joshua and the other leaders came up with. This was commanded by the Lord Himself. These were cities of refuge for people who killed unintentionally. We call this negligent homicide in our criminal codes today. It is a killing that is done unintentionally. God was protecting people from personal acts of vengeance. A vengeful attitude is poison to a believer. When we've been hurt by others, our Canaan Living is finished if we are unable to forgive. The hurt, the unforgiveness, becomes central to our identity. We nurse the grudge. When we hold a grudge, we are captives to our flesh and ourselves. Holding a grudge and living a victorious Christian life are inconsistent with one another; they cannot be experienced at the same time. God is telling us in this chapter that mercy is at the heart of the victorious Christian life.

Wednesday, we talked about how we had each been shown mercy in our lives. We talked also about how we might have had the right to be offended but we chose to forgive. I have been wounded deeply by things that others have done to me, but with the help of the Holy Spirit, I was able to find peace and joy by extending mercy and grace.

Let me be very clear. THIS CANNOT BE DONE IN THE FLESH. The flesh wants someone to pay. The flesh wants to strike back. The flesh wants revenge. But, there is no peace or joy in a grudge. The fruit of a grudge is bitterness, anger, and an absence of joy and peace in a person's life.

Failing to show mercy will take you out of Promised Land living faster than anything, and that is why God set up these cities of refuge. We are all called to show mercy. We all need mercy. When others make a mistake, they are in need of mercy. Church members can be pretty unmerciful with each other. We quickly forget that we're a hospital for sinners, not a hotel for saints.

We are black and white too often and we get into a pack-like mentality like a pack of wild dogs or coyotes. There was a song that came out in the 1970's called "Don't Shoot the Wounded." So, I'll ask you this morning, how do you react when others make a mistake or when they live a life that you think is sinful? Does mercy and grace pour out of you, or are you quick to "shoot the wounded?" I am not talking about giving sin a pass, but I'm talking about where your heart goes when you see failings in others. God's Word says that ours is a ministry of reconciliation. We are to bring others back into a relationship with the Lord and we're to reconcile our own differences with others.

1983 Don't Shoot the Wounded, Chuck Girard
I suggest those reading this sermon take time to watch the following rendition of this song on Youtube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZFOvaG1gzVw

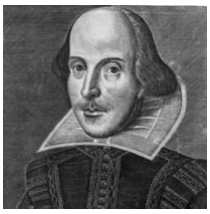
Here is the chorus.

> Don't shoot the wounded, they need us more than ever
> They need our love no matter what it is they've done
> Sometimes we just condemn them,
> And don't take time to hear their story
> Don't shoot the wounded, someday you might be one

There will be a cost to being unmerciful. James, the brother of Jesus, says*, "because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment."(James 2:13, NIV).*

Wow. That's really a very scary verse. It says that if we fail to show mercy, God will deal with us in a similar way. I need all of the mercy I can get. I don't want to get what I deserve. I want mercy, and you probably want mercy too. We are being told that if we are merciful people, we will receive mercy. Mercy is important because it is a God-like quality. It is not natural to humans. I remember being in 8th grade in the play "The

Merchant of Venice." I was in the lead role, and my character had a beautiful soliloquy. It read:



"The quality of mercy is not strained.
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blessed:
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest. It becomes
The thronèd monarch better than his crown.

……
It is an attribute to God himself.
And earthly power doth then show likest God's
When mercy seasons justice.

This beautiful quote reminds us that mercy is a blessing to the person who gives it and to the person who receives it. It is stronger than a king and the law that brings justice. Mercy is above all of that. When we exercise mercy, we are like God Himself.

We then get into chapter 21 which has a beautiful end to it.

43 *So the LORD gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their ancestors, and they took possession of it and settled there.* ***44*** *The LORD gave them rest on every side, just as he had sworn to their ancestors. Not one of their enemies withstood them; the LORD gave all their enemies into their hands.* ***45*** *Not one of all the LORD's good promises to Israel failed; every one was fulfilled. (Joshua 21:43-45, NIV).*

I love the sentence that not one of the Lord's good promises to Israel failed. Every one was fulfilled. And do you know what? We too will find that not one of the Lord's good promises for us will fail. God fulfills His promises. You can learn them. You can lean on them. You can depend on them. And that my friends, is Canaan Living.

Let us pray.

Union Grove is one of the oldest Baptist communities of faith in the State of Texas dating back to 1844. Pastor Faber McMullen may be reached by email at uniongrove362@gmail.com or by snail mail at: 15301 FM 362, Navasota, Texas 77868. Tel: 936-825-1227 (Edited and proofed by Amanda Neese- Webster, Texas.) All financial gifts to this ministry are tax-deductible as a 501 (c) (3) Corporation.

Tips on Being Merciful by Rick Warren

"Treat everyone you meet with dignity."
1 Peter 2:17 (The Message)
The Bible says God expects you to show mercy to everybody. How are you supposed to do that? Here are three simple, practical ways to be God's agent of mercy in the world.

1- **Forgive people when they mess up.** "*When people sin, you should forgive and comfort them, so they won't give up in despair"* (2 Corinthians 2:7 CEV). The normal reaction when somebody hurts you is to want to either get even or write them off. But a merciful person forgives the fallen.

Part of the Lord's Prayer says, *"Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us"* (Luke 11:4 NLT). When you pray this, you're saying, "God, I want you to forgive me as much as I forgive everybody who's hurt me." Are you ready to pray that prayer?

2- **Be patient with people's quirks.** We all have our idiosyncrasies and irritating habits. That's right—even you! When you refuse to get upset over other people's habits, you are showing mercy.

During the pandemic, while so many people are stuck at home, the most important marriage advice I can give you is Ephesians 4:2: *"Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults"* (TLB). The first place you need to show mercy is at home.

3- **Show respect to people you disagree with.** You don't have to agree with everyone. But you can disagree with people without being disagreeable. God says, *"Treat everyone you meet with dignity"* (1 Peter 2:17 The Message). Does that include people you disagree with and don't like? Yes. Treat *everyone* with dignity.

Jesus gets really radical about mercy. In Luke 6:35 he says to love your enemies and do good to them. That starts with laying down your need to be right and to win the argument every time.

Do you want to win the argument, or do you want to win people to Christ? To win people to Christ, choose mercy.

When's the last time you did something good for an enemy? When's the last time you did something good for somebody you totally disagree with politically or spiritually? When's the last time you showed mercy to someone in your home?

God sees when you choose mercy, and he will honor your obedience. It will often be difficult, but it will always be worth it to be merciful, just as God your Father is merciful.[1]

[1] https://pastorrick.com/how-to-be-merciful-to-everyone/